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U.S. orders Soviet U.N. staff cut

By Warren Strobel
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Charging that members of the Soviet missions to the United Nations routinely engage in espionage and other improprieties, the United States has ordered a 38 percent reduction in their staff.

The order affects not only the main Soviet mission, but those of Byelorussia and the Ukraine, two Soviet republics seated separately at the United Nations as part of the agreement establishing the international body in 1945.

The surprise order will force the three Soviet missions to cut their total staff from 275 to 170 in four stages by April 1988.

Even at the reduced level, staff at the three missions would far out-

number the U.S. staff of 126 and the People's Republic of China's staff of 110. The Soviet presence is the largest among the United Nations' 159 member countries.

In a statement issued Friday, the U.S. mission to the United Nations said that "the United States government has long been concerned about the unreasonably large size of the Soviet U.N. missions.

"Soviet U.N. missions have continued to engage in activities unrelated to U.N. business, including espionage," the United States charged.

The size and character of the three missions pose a threat to U.S. national security, the statement said.

The Soviets have not formally responded to the charges.

Administration officials and lawmakers have contended that as many

as one-third of the Soviet nationals detailed to the United Nations are at least part-time spies, while Soviet defector Arkady Shevchenko has put the figure at close to one-half.

In a November report, a Pentagon panel charged with reviewing security practices urged further controls on Soviet bloc personnel at the United Nations and elsewhere in the country.

The U.S. action was based on a number of treaties, including a 1947 agreement that established U.N. headquarters in New York City. But high-ranking U.N. officials are investigating the legality of the order at the direction of Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar, according to reports published Saturday.

Juliana Pilon, senior U.N. policy analyst at the conservative Heritage

Foundation, said that the action has been "in the works" at least since November and probably was moved along with the help of Assistant Secretary of State for International Organizations Alan L. Keyes and sympathetic officials in the department's Office of Foreign Missions.

"With kind of a renewed detente in the air [following November's superpower summit in Geneva] ... these sorts of events are a good reminder what the situation really is," Mrs. Pilon said. "It shows the president is not starry-eyed about East-West relations.

"It [the Soviet presence] is still awfully large," said Mrs. Pilon, author of a 1983 paper on Soviet abuses of the United Nations. "I don't see why it should be any larger than ours, to be perfectly realistic," she said.

"The next step will be to cut down some of the other Soviet bloc missions," she said.